

March 10, 2004

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## WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

### The Future of History

Patrick Browne loves his place in public history. Academic history prepares the scholar for life in the field, but Patrick's preference, and his job as Executive Director of Duxbury's Rural and Historical Society, put him where history meets the people. Public history brings life to the past through museums, preservation of significant lands and buildings, re-enactment and other such activities for the general public. It even includes the occasional lecture series, but the goal is always to boost patrons' experience and understanding of life in the past.



For those who missed Duxbury's significance in history, here's a synopsis: Wampanoags. Many died just before the onset of the Europeans. A few remained for a time (Hitty Tom, a woman, was the last Wampanoag in Duxbury). We still use their roads, gently curving, dry in the wettest weather. Pilgrims came from Plymouth looking for elbow-room, a few at a time. Revolutionary War – Tories moved to Canada or Provincetown, patriots got a little more elbow-room. Dirt here was no better than it is now (brownish-

You can sharpen your "memory" of Duxbury's contribution on the high seas next April 17th, at an all-day Maritime History Symposium at Plymouth's Radisson Hotel from 8:00 am to 3:45 pm (\$35, lunch and snacks included. Call 934-6106 for details). The event is sponsored by Back Roads of the South Shore, a collaboration of Wampanoag

sand, so the men went fishing instead of farming, building their own boats to do it. They got good at it, and filled the waterfront with shipyards. Duxbury ships, sailors, and merchants gobbled up global market share – Duxbury-built meant fast and seaworthy. Then clipper ships, steam and iron knocked the teeth out of the market for Duxbury-sized ships, 1850-ish. Nobody could afford to replace Federal with Victorian gingerbread, and here we are.

The flowering of the shipbuilding period fascinates Patrick Browne, especially the accomplishments of Ezra Weston, known as King Caesar. Within that topic, the simple things excite him most – exploring the things many people take for granted, like how a neighborhood looks, or a house still lived in. In studying history and presenting it to the public, we touch on the simple things that, Patrick says, "...ought to be appreciated. People should not be forgotten."

Societies from Hingham to Plymouth, and focuses on "Views Fore and Aft," covering the birth, life, and death of ships and shipbuilding along the South Shore. Moreover, the symposium will touch on the past, present, and future of public history in the region.

Remember the schooner *Ernestina* at the Maritime School's Opening of the Bay? One of her captains – Amanda Madeira – will speak on the New Bedford program's marine ecology and other educational features. *Ernestina* is a sample of the potential future of the public history. Built in Essex over a century ago, the Grand Banks schooner worked the Atlantic under sail until the 1960's, based in the Cape Verde Islands. Now she puts history into the hands of Massachusetts' youth, a tangible memory of the people who sailed her through a hundred years. Rudyard Kipling might have known her as the *Effie M. Morrissey*, launched three years before he published his classic of high seas fiction, *Captains Courageous*. He mentioned Duxbury in the book. I'll read it again to see if the *Effie M. Morrissey* caught his eye.

Patrick, meanwhile, spends his days as a jack-of-all trades, coordinating such projects as the restoration of 200-year-old buildings – "A thrill," he says, "to see them restored, to see them live." Nevertheless, he does get to "poke" a little, delighted to find in the extensive archives such treasures as a photo of King Caesar mugging for the camera with a beloved pooch. It's people's lives – day by day – that make history worth experiencing.

The Republic of Cape Verde donated *Ernestina* to the people of the United States, celebrating her later years bringing cargo and people from their islands to a new life in America. My Cape Verdean neighbors? Maybe. I'll ask my neighbor Tony when I see him. Thanks to public historians like Patrick Browne and his colleagues, I know to ask the question.